



Alliance of
Independent
Authors

ALLi Member Handbooks



Self-Publishing (Almost) for Free: A Checklist



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*If it's inaccessible to the poorest amongst us,
then it's neither radical nor revolutionary.*

~ Anonymous

Introduction

The Alliance of Independent Authors aims to empower every writer who wants to self-publish well. We know meeting professional publishing standards can create a financial barrier for some authors, especially those just starting out. A good cover, for example, can cost \$500. A good editor costs \$700-1200, depending on the length of the book.

Quality publishing respects readers and makes a book far more likely to succeed, but if you don't have money to invest, this checklist aims to get you started with little or no expenditure. It then guides you towards the best place to begin investing when you do have some money to spend on your publishing business. Most of what we suggest here is absolutely free but we've included one or two vital tools that are very inexpensive.

Two caveats: Firstly, when you decide to self-publish, you become a publisher, and publishing is a business. A business owner invests money to make more money ... so you'll do best if you think more about return-on-investment than costs. This is a mind shift that can take time (and seeing some profits) to sink in but instead of asking: how much does it cost, get into the habit of asking: how much return can I expect on this investment, once I can afford it?

Secondly, you need to learn to value your time as much as money. If you can't invest money, you'll have to invest time, of course, but make sure you're not wasting your most valuable commodity. Sometimes, paying for assistance or a tool might actually yield you more money, more quickly and effectively, than doing everything yourself. Should you beg or borrow some money to make it happen?

This checklist assumes you have internet access (which, together with computers, is usually available and free in libraries). We strongly recommend you get to know your local library. They can get you any book you need (information about grants and support, books on how to write and publish better, organizations that can help you etc.). They also offer a quiet place to write and do your publishing tasks.

We also recommend you invest some income back into your publishing business as you grow, while also paying yourself.

And our top recommendation is to prioritise writing more books over everything else.

Getting Started

Comparable Authors

Start your self-publishing adventure by finding comparable authors and books, using "The 10 Books Method". Get hold of 10 recent (last 3 years), successful books in your genre, either free from a library, or look at them online. Observe them from a publishing perspective, particularly editing, design, production and marketing.

Analyse their covers. Look at their blurbs and book descriptions. Read their reviews and see what people like about them. Ideally, read the books as well, so you know the genre you're joining. This sort of comparison will be a huge help to you going forward.

Get Advice

The most successful self-published authors have one thing in common: they never stop learning.

To avail of our expertise across the seven processes of publishing, come to ALLI's Self Publishing Advice Center and look up whatever you need to know right now in our knowledge archives. Our information and education is free and one day we hope to welcome you as a member.

Blog: <https://selfpublishingadvice.org/blog>

YouTube: <https://selfpublishingadvice.org/video>

Audio: <https://selfpublishingadvice.org/podcast>

Website and reader funnel

Every author needs an author website, a way of attracting readers and delivering books and other content to them, and an email list.

- **Website:** Having your own website is vital for a self-publishing author. It is your central hub online, showcasing your work and getting readers onto your mailing list. Ideally it should be a transactional website, with e-commerce options, so you can sell books directly to readers. Use your author name .com as your domain name. If it's

already taken, you can also add Author (e.g. JoeSmithAuthor.com) Wix has a very cheap opening plan which you can upgrade later. WordPress is the open source option, free but less user friendly.

- **Reader Downloads:** BookFunnel: For \$20 per year this tool that allows you to manage the delivery of e-books to your readers to a) send free copies to reviewers b) sell direct from your website c) give away free copies as part of a promotional push. You can also use this tool to join or create author group promotions.
- **Build a mailing list.** Your mailing list of readers is the core of your publishing business. The more subscribers you can collect, the more successful you will be in marketing and promoting your books, over the long term. MailChimp and ConvertKit are two examples of the many email managers out there that allow you to collect up to 2000 subscribers for free. When you're ready, you can upgrade your plan.

From manuscript to published book

Editorial: Beta Readers

Use beta readers to help you develop, deepen and improve your manuscript. These are friends or colleagues who love to read in your genre and can give you useful feedback on your book: pointing out plot holes or inconsistencies, for example, or anything they found confusing or think you could do better.

Editorial: Proofing

Use free online grammar and proofing tools like Grammarly. Then, find a friend or relative who is good at grammar and written language, and ask them to read and review your manuscript for grammatical mistakes or clumsy phrasing. Sometimes newly-trained editors will do an edit for free, as they need practice and benefit from testimonials, and you may find these on writing forums.

Design: Interior formatting

Reedsy has a free online tool that will create both print and e-book files for your manuscript. <https://reedsy.com/write-a-book>

Design: Book cover

Use the free online design tool Canva for e-books, don't mess with the design elements as they've been put together by a professional designer. Research your genre: the ten books will guide you to choosing a cover that looks like it fits in with others in that genre.

For fiction, stick with e-books initially, as they make up 90% of sales anyway.

For non-fiction, you need to have a paperback available as people frequently prefer that for non-fiction, especially practical topics (e.g. how-to books).

Audiobooks: Audiobooks are expensive. Technically, you can make one for free on Amazon Audiobook Exchange (ACX) on a split royalties arrangement with a narrator willing to work for this arrangement. In practice, ALLi has found this arrangement is rarely advantageous to either party and leads to loss of publishing freedom for seven years or longer. Audiobooks are expensive and it is best to wait until you can afford to pay a good narrator than enter into a split rights arrangement.

Marketing

Blurbs: Spend lots of time getting your book description and testimonials just right. It's free and a major part of the reader's decision-making process (cover, blurb, reviews).

Author Pages: As well as your website, make sure you have a good author page on Amazon and other book retail platforms like Apple Books, Kobo and Google. Research the qualities of a good author photo and have one taken against a white background. Write a good biography. List your website address and encourage readers to find you there, so you can try to get them onto your mailing list. Encourage readers to follow you and write reviews of your books.

Keywords and categories: Research your ten books again. Get yourself into the most appropriate categories on Amazon KDP (contact customer support to do this for you). Make sure your keywords are as strong as possible. Don't be afraid to change up your metadata as often as you want to optimise. It costs nothing but time and thought.

Reader Magnet 1 for Your Website: Write a free short book that targets your genre which you will offer as a free download on your site in return for people joining your mailing list.

Reader Magnet 2 for Other Book Retailers: Write another Reader Magnet and make it free on Amazon and other book retailers, to allow new readers to find you and test you out.

Inside Your Book Marketing: Add a request for a review at the end. List your other books and your website. Guide them to your reader magnet and to sign up for your mailing list.

Newsletters: Write engaging newsletters to your email subscribers.

Newsletter Swaps: Once you have a regular newsletter with some followers, contact other authors with a similar reach in your genre and mention one another in your newsletters. These are known as “newsletter swaps”.

Reviews: Approach online reviewers in your genre and ask them to review your book. You can then use these on your ‘editorial reviews’ page on retail platforms, your own website, book covers, etc.

Keep learning: There will always be some new trends in publishing, as well as new tools and tech, and better ways of doing something you’ve already put in place. The most successful authors make time to think strategically, to revise what they’ve done so far, and to keep up to date with the self-publishing industry.

When and What to Upgrade

Once you have some money to spend, don’t rush to buy the latest shiny marketing promise. Instead, retrace your steps to ensure

a quality product: improve your editing, covers and interior layout, if needed. Nothing can out-market these. As a member of ALLi, you will be able to access our Directory of vetted Partners, from editors to cover designers, and receive valuable discounts on their services, so you might want to think about membership sooner rather than later. Here are some important steps:

- Save as much of the money your book/s make as possible and bring in an editor, either for your next book, or the original one. This will probably cost the equivalent of \$700–\$1200 in your country, try to view this as a really bespoke coaching opportunity, you will learn a LOT about your writing weak spots.
- Ask for recommendations for a good cover designer, some will sell ‘premade’ covers at a discount, others you may need to save up for but a good cover is a powerful marketing tool. Up to \$500.
- Interior formatting done by a professional will probably cost \$120–\$250

We hope that by offering this **Self-Publishing (Almost) for Free Checklist**, we will contribute towards reducing financial barriers to self-publishing and thus broaden the diversity of authors and their stories in our industry. Please feel free to share this checklist to anyone who might benefit from it. We only ask that it be shared in its entirety and in its current format. If you wish to share it in other ways, please contact us at the Alliance of Independent Authors. Thank you.

Do visit our *Self-Publishing for All* page for more help and support. www.allianceindependentauthors.org/ongoing-campaigns/self-publishing-for-all-campaign



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Alliance of
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What is ALLi?

The Alliance of Independent Authors is an award-winning non-profit association for writers, with a mission of ethics and excellence in self-publishing.

ALLi has a global team who, together with ambassadors and advisors worldwide, provides trusted, best-practice education and advice and provide members and the wider author-publishing community with an extensive suite of benefits.

ALLi is global and growing, with members on all seven continents, and outreach campaigns and programs with a global reach that have had an impact at every level of the wider author community.

Find us at www.allianceindependentauthors.org

(All costs given here are approximate and given as broad guides in US dollars.)